

One cold night

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Summary: In Season 5 Episode 10, Kilgharrah rescued Merlin where he lies bleeding at the top of a watchtower in the middle of the night. But what if the dragon were not able to come? Who would rescue Merlin?

1. Chapter 1

The first thing Merlin noticed was that he was cold.

There was a chilly wind across his face. His hands felt numb. And he was so stiff. So tired.

He shivered.

Where was he?

Slowly, he tried to make the gears in his mind turn. His eyes were closed. Was he asleep? He seemed to be outside. He thought hard, trying to remember.

He tried to turn his head and it barely moved. He felt weak and sick. He tried again, this time trying to use his stomach muscles again, maybe to sit up.

That didn't work. Pain pushed through his side, taking his breath away. He fell back. With the pain came sudden memories - of Finna. Of Morgana. Of the arrow and the sword.

He grimaced in sadness.

Yes. He was alone on the roof of a watchtower. He had heard Finna die. Her bloodstains, mixed with his own, lay dry and dark one floor beneath him. He'd collapsed on that roof and called for the dragon. And then he had passed out.

But where was Kilgharrah?

Merlin's luck seemed to have run out.

He could not say how long he had lain there, unknowing. There was no more moon in the sky. It must have been hours. But the great dragon had not come.

Shivering, he tried to curl himself into a tighter position. Nothing worked. His body felt frail, weak, broken. He kept shivering and couldn't stop. He felt himself still sluggishly bleeding from the arrow wound. He tried to heal himself, murmuring an incantation, his eyes glowing in the night.

It didn't work. It never did.

Healing, he thought wryly, had never been one of his gifts.

I don't want to die here, he thought. I have to get back to Arthur. I have to protect him.

I will call for the dragon again, he thought. He coughed, drawing the words from his parched throat. And more importantly, as always, he reached out with his mind. _Come, my old friend! I am in my hour of greatest need. Hear my call, O great winged one! _

He called, coughing and retching, and called again. His eyes flashed with fire and he breathed hard with the effort.

But no one came. The great dragon did not hear him, or could not hear him.

Worry pushed into Merlin's thoughts. Kilgharrah had never failed him. Something, or someone, must be keeping the dragon from coming. There would be no help from the skies tonight.

Merlin felt his shivers deepen. He was beginning to wonder if he would indeed last much longer, freezing and bleeding in a tiny bloody ball on this cold stone roof.

He was so tired, and so coldâ€¦

He felt his mind drift. He found himself thinking of Arthur. His dearest Arthur. Arrogant prat; noble king. Merlin's closest friend. His destiny.

Would that Arthur could fly and come to his rescue!

Arthur.

Rescue.

His thoughts were cold and tired and leaden, but somehow, slowly, he realized that his brain was trying to tell him something...what was it?

Arthur.

He could call to Arthur.

Could he?

Well, why not? He had nothing to lose; he would be dead on this roof within days.

He closed his tired eyes and reached his mind out to Arthur.

Help me, my friendâ€¦!

He tried with all he had to send his thoughts to the one man he hoped could hear him; could reach him; could find him.

Could bring him home.

Arthur...

2. Chapter 2

Merlin!

Arthur sat up in bed, confused and - well - more than a little scared. What? What happened? Who?

He blinked and looked around. He was in his chambers. All was calm. Silent.

It was the middle of the night...no, it was very early morning. He could see the faint blue light through his shutters. He turned his head. There was his darling Gwen, lying in the warm pocket he'd left, her curls fanned out grandly on her pillow. He let his eyes linger on her face. He tried to calm his heart, which, he realized, was beating rather more quickly than it should have been.

What had woken him?

He'd been dreaming...he tried to remember...

Of Merlin?

That's absurd. What is that idiot doing in my dreams? Disturbing the sleep of his King? I'll thrash him good, he thought belligerently.

He was trying to rid himself of his unease.

It didn't work.

The dream had left a taste of panic in his mouth. What was it? What had happened in his dream to upset him so?

A rooftop...a broken body...

It was all fading now. Anyway, it was rubbish. He'd probably eaten too many pickles at dinner.

He forced himself to sigh, to relax. To lay back down. He squeezed his arm under Gwen's head. She murmured and allowed him to re-adjust her, burrowing her head into his neck. He felt her nuzzle him and

held her close. He kissed her hair. Listened as she slept.

He hoped the nasty feeling of fear in his gut would dissipate soon.

It didn't, really.

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An hour later he was still awake and still uneasy. He finally gave up trying to sleep. That damn Merlin could use some extra work anyway.

He threw on a leather shirt and leaned over to kiss Gwen. He was hoping very much that she'd wake up, but she only murmured, her eyes closed. He smiled, feeling strangely sad, and let her sleep, closing the door quietly behind him.

In the hallway it was still early. The blue dawn had become a clear, cold, pale yellow morning. The few servants he passed were busy building the day's fires. The air was fresh and chilly on his nose.

He trotted down the castle stairs and over to the Court physician's quarters, pulling on his gloves.

He pushed open the door and strolled in, paying, as usual, little heed to the privacy or sleeping hours of others. "Merlin!" He bellowed.

There was no response.

"Merlin! You buffoon, get out of bed!" He wasn't sure if it was lack of sleep or something else that made his tone so snappish. He tried to hide his worry with more irritation. "MER-"

He stopped as Gaius poked his head out of his covers from his bed in the corner, looking alarmed. "Sire?" He fumbled to get up. "Sire, what is the matter?"

Instantly Arthur felt a little chagrined. "No- no. Mm...I'm sorry Gaius. There's no emergency. I just - I just want to get off to an early start today. Mm. Is - is Merlin here?"

Gaius huffed with a little badly-hidden annoyance and relaxed back into his bed. "No, Sire. I thought he spent the night in his quarters in the Castle with you." He frowned. "He wasn't with you?"

"No."

"Hmmm." Arthur suddenly found something very interesting to look at past Gaius' head, over his shoulder. Gaius, too, seemed to be going out of his way to avoid eye contact.

"Well, um...tell him that I'm looking for him." Arthur reached again for his most cocky self, trying not to feel completely lost. Why on earth was he so worried about that buffoon Merlin? "When you see him, tell him he'll lose his job and end up in the stocks if he doesn't show up soon."

Both men were relieved when Arthur took his leave and ducked out the door.

Arthur decided to go out for a ride. Maybe that would help him shake off this feeling.

Gaius watched the door where Arthur had been, lost in thought and a little worried himself. Where was Merlin?

3. Chapter 3

The morning air was still brisk and fresh an hour later as Arthur gently pulled on the reins, slowing his horse to a walk. He did feel much better.

The hills were a glorious green, the sun was warm on his face, and he was refreshed. The nightmare was all but forgotten.

He spied a stream tucked into the trees and urged his mount that way. With a sigh of pleasure he dismounted and scooped himself a cool drink. He'd left the castle in such consternation he hadn't even grabbed his own wineskin. The drink was delicious after a hard ride. Next to him his horse was up to her nostrils, grunting happily.

He stood, wiping the water from his chin like a peasant, and found himself smiling broadly. The castle walls would never equal the natural beauty of his kingdom. He was so proud of his lands. He stretched his arms out widely; raised his closed eyes to the sky to soak in the sun.

Then suddenly he was somewhere else...

Arthur...

The vision hit him like a brick. He saw a rooftop. A watchtower. And Merlin, still and tiny against the stones. Bleeding. Dying or dead.

Arthur...

It faded.

Arthur was still in the forest, still himself, alone.

He staggered and sat hard in a rock, trembling. It was hard to breathe. He was scared, then anger rushed in to rescue him, to focus him. He knew - he felt it in his gut - this was sorcery. This was sorcery!

Someone was trying to get him to believe that Merlin was hurt. That Merlin needed him.

Monstrous. It was a trap. It had to be. Someone was trying to lure the King of Camelot to an evil purpose.

"Well, it won't work!" He yelled into the empty forest. "Do you hear me, Morgana? It won't work!"

His voice echoed back to him.

He realized how alone he was, and his fear rose again to match his anger.

Breathing heavily, he pushed the fear down and let the rage give him strength. He was so angry he barely remembered throwing himself on his horse and riding back to the castle.

End
file.